

Kelabit language

Kelabit is one of the most remote languages of Borneo, on the Sarawak–Kalimantan border. It is spoken by one of the smallest ethnicities in Borneo, the Kelabit people.

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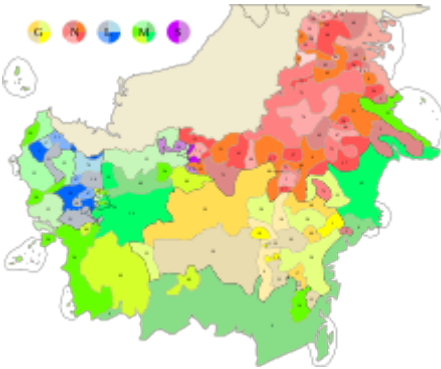
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Phonology

Vowels are /ə, a, e, i, o, u/. All consonants but the aspirated voiced stops are lengthened after stressed /ə/. Stress generally occurs on the penultimate syllable.

Kelabit is notable for having "a typologically rare series of true voiced aspirates" (that is, not breathy voice/murmured consonants; for some speakers they are prevoiced) along with modally voiced and tenuis consonants but without an accompanying series of voiceless aspirates. It is the only language known to have voiced aspirates or murmured consonants without also having voiceless aspirated consonants, a situation that has been reconstructed for Proto-Indo-European.^[3] (See glottalic theory.)

Kelabit	
Region	Borneo
Native speakers	5,000 (2000–2011) ^[1]
Language family	Austronesian - Malayo-Polynesian - North Bornean - North Sarawakan - Apo Duat Kelabit
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	kzi
Glottolog	kela1258 (http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/kela1258) ^[2]



Kelabit among the languages of Kalimantan (orange #27, top)

Kelabit consonants^[4]

		<u>Bilabial</u>	<u>Dental</u>	<u>Alveolar</u>	<u>Postalveolar /Palatal</u>	<u>Velar</u>	<u>Glottal</u>
<u>Nasal</u>		<u>m</u>		<u>n</u>		<u>ŋ</u>	
<u>Stop</u>	<u>tenuis</u>	<u>p</u>	<u>t̪</u>			<u>k</u>	<u>ʔ</u>
	<u>modally voiced</u>	<u>b</u>		<u>d</u>	(dʒ)	<u>g</u>	
	<u>aspirated voiced /prevoiced</u>	<u>b̥pʰ ~ b̥p</u>		<u>ɖt̪ʰ ~ ɖt̪</u>		<u>ɡkʰ ~ ɡk</u>	
<u>Fricative</u>				<u>s</u>			<u>h</u>
<u>Sonorant</u>				<u>l, ɭ</u>	<u>j</u>	<u>w</u>	

At the end of a word, /t/ is pronounced [θ]. For some speakers, /ɖt̪ʰ/ is affricated; in neighboring Lun Dayeh, the reflex of this consonant is an unaspirated affricate [ɖt̪ʃ]. /dʒ/ is rare, and is not attested from all dialects.

The flap is alveolar. It's not clear if /n/ and the other coronal sonorants are alveolar like /d/ or dental like /t/.

The aspirated voiced series only occurs intervocalically, and may have arisen from geminate consonants. They are at least impressionistically twice as long as other stops. They vary with /b d g/ under suffixation, with /b̥pʰ ɖt̪ʰ ɡkʰ/ occurring where other consonants would be allophonically geminated:

- /təb̥pʰəŋ/ [' təb̥pʰəŋ] 'to fell' > /təbəŋ-ən/ [tə ' bəŋ : əŋ] 'fell it!'
- /kətəd/ [' kət : əd] 'back (n)' > /kətəɖt̪ʰ-ən/ [kə ' təɖt̪ʰən] 'to be left behind'

There are several arguments for analyzing the aspirated voiced consonants as segments rather than as consonant clusters:

- There are no (other) clusters allowed in the language. Some languages allow only geminate consonants as clusters, but there are no (other) phonemic geminates in Kelabit. In some related languages, such as Ida'an, the reflexes of these sounds clearly do behave as clusters.
- The syllable break occurs before the consonants (that is, [a.bpa], and not in the middle ([ab.pa]), which is the behaviour of consonant clusters (including geminates) in related languages that allow them. /i, u/ lower to [ɪ, ʊ] before any non-glottal coda consonant. They do not lower before the aspirated voiced consonants, again suggesting they are not consonant clusters.

The aspirated voiced series does not appear in all dialects of Kelabit or Lun Dayeh:

Reflexes in Kelabit and Lun Dayeh dialects^[4]

<u>b̥pʰ (h)</u>	<u>ɖt̪ʰ (h)</u>	<u>ɡkʰ (h)</u>	Bario, Pa' Omor, Long Lellang, Lun Dayeh: Long Semado
p	t	k	Pa' Mada
p	tʃ	k	Long Terawan Tring
p	s	k	Batu Patung, Pa' Dalih, Sa'ban
f	tʃ	k	Lun Dayeh: Long Pala
f	s	k	Long Napir, Long Seridan

References

1. Kelabit (<https://www.ethnologue.com/18/language/kzi/>) at *Ethnologue* (18th ed., 2015)
2. Hammarström, Harald; Forkel, Robert; Haspelmath, Martin, eds. (2017). "Kelabit" (<http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/kela1258>). *Glottolog 3.0*. Jena, Germany: Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History.
3. Robert Blust, 1974. A double counter-universal in Kelabit. *Papers in Linguistics* :309-24.
4. Robert Blust, 2006, "The Origin of the Kelabit Voiced Aspirates: A Historical Hypothesis Revisited", *Oceanic Linguistics* 45:311

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External links

- [ELAR](http://elar.soas.ac.uk/deposit/0301) archive of Kelabit language documentation materials (<http://elar.soas.ac.uk/deposit/0301>)
- [Kaipuleohone](https://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/handle/10125/33115) archive of Robert Blust's materials include notes on Kelabit (<https://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/handle/10125/33115>).

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